

Therapy with Single Parents: A Social Constructionist Approach

Joan D. Atwood and Frank Genovese.
New York: Haworth Press, 2006.

Reviewed by Tatjana Chorney

Therapy with Single Parents: A Social Constructionist Approach is an indispensable resource for professional counselors working with single-parent families, school guidance counselors, and educators who teach in the areas of Social Studies, Sociology, Psychology, Gender Studies, Cultural Studies, and Education. Authored by professionals with backgrounds in practice and teaching, this useful book will have a wide appeal. Although some sections apply to single-parent fathers, much of the book is directed to women.

Divided into four broad sections, the book deals with common concerns focused around the cognitive behavioral principles of single-parent families; the social and psychological differences between divorce and widowhood; dealing with the ghosts of past relationships; relationship rules; the effect of change in divorcing families; what children can learn from divorce; the feminization of poverty; and the therapeutic value of social networks.

In their introduction, the authors claim that their work is “unique because it is the first book on therapy with single parents that includes a focus on the strengths of the single-parent family, rather than a focus on the deficits, which is more typically seen” in literature dealing with relationships, divorce, and counseling (6). While the authors by no means ignore the emotional and financial problems often experienced by members of single-parent families, they present a more balanced view—based on recent, sound methodological research—of the single-parent family as “a viable, healthy family form” (6). This is a welcome and revolutionary claim that challenges entrenched social stereotypes.

Atwood and Genovese argue that our understanding of relationships and single-parent families is socially constructed. They suggest that “one nurturing and loving parent can produce healthy and productive individuals if society’s prejudices do not interfere,” and appeal to professionals to “examine some of these [societal] assumptions” (6). In fact, the value of this book lies in this direct appeal, its systematic exploration of the single-parent family system, and the social stereotypes and assumptions underlying what they describe as the “Intact Family Myth.” The authors identify four major assumptions that constitute the Intact Family Myth: (i) long-term relationships are good and short-term relationships are bad; in other words, marriage “should be” forever; (ii) a society in which people live to age 75 can operate with the same relationship commitments as a society in which people live to age 45; (iii) the

traditional family model of father, mother, and children is the basic social unit and should be strengthened; and (iv) only dysfunctional adults divorce and this results in dysfunctional children (3).

A series of illustrative examples drawn from the authors' practice are intended to help therapists and their clients adopt a healthy attitude toward the single-parent family and explore unconscious, "covert rules that people co-create" to choreograph their interactions and mask their fears (102).

The section that examines the school system is especially valuable and relevant; it reveals that many school officials, guidance counselors, classroom teachers, and single parents themselves assume that any academic problems that children from single-parent families may face are always caused by the absence of one parent. This erroneous assumption is exposed through an examination of the academic scores of children in single-parent families. The results clearly show that "there is no one academic consequence to living in a single-parent family: some children have problems; for some there is no effect; and for others there is an improvement" (191).

Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief

Suzanne Evans.

Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Reviewed by Cayo Gamber

As Suzanne Evans explains in her preface, *Mothers of Heroes, Mothers of Martyrs: World War I and the Politics of Grief* focuses on "mothers of the fallen and how their stories have been used and modified in different historical contexts to create a martyrology"; her purpose is to explicate how these stories, of mothers and the fallen, when "used by master propagandists to unite society in the waging of war, still maintain their grip" (x). Evans makes clear there is a long tradition of religious martyrology, focusing on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim martyrologies, including "the Macabean mother" who convinces her seven sons that it is better to die for God and religious practice than give in to King Antiochus's demand to defile their faith by eating pork, Mother Mary who silently watches as her son is sacrificed in order to intercede for all who sin, and Fatima who lived with the foreknowledge that her yet-unborn son's death one day would save his community. Evans demonstrates that the image of the mother sacrificing her child "is so powerful that it is not surprising it should become a touchstone, a measure of love and devotion to a cause and to the divine" (17). Ultimately, she reveals the ways in which this tradition and